

The *Historian*

of Hancock County

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

November 1995

NOVEMBER MEETING

The November meeting of the Hancock County Historical Society will be held at 12 noon on November 16 at the Eastern Star Hall at 601 Bouslog Street, across from the side of the Highway 90 Post Office. The cost of lunch will be \$5.00, tax and tip are included.

Mrs. Joan Porbes Howard will tell us more about Kiln and the Jourdan River Area. A part of her book, *"Many Faces of Change"* is presented in this newsletter.

Please, please, please telephone 467-4090 for reservations, at least two days in advance so that we can notify the ladies for their preparations.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

We will be nominating and electing officers for 1996 at the meeting on the 16th. Normally the nominations are made at the October meeting but because it was held in Cedar Rest Cemetery, we will both nominate and elect our new officers at this meeting.

The offices of President, 2nd Vice President in charge of Lobrano House, Correspondance Secretery, Historian and Publicity

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THIS WATER WHEEL NEAR MCLEOD'S STORE
PROVIDED KILN'S FIRST ELECTRIC POWER

EARLY KILN

By Joan Porbes Howard

Kiln, about 13 miles northwest of Bay St. Louis, was first inhabited by Choctaw and Muskogean Indians. These tribes lived along the banks of a navigable river later named Jourdan after Noel Jourdan who served as delegate to the Mississippi Constitutional Convention. These tribes hunted, fished and trapped. In the late 1700s French settlers infiltrated their grounds. As time passed, the Indian and French cultures intermingled. Crude footpaths widened into rough winding roads. In 1800 a Spanish land grant was acquired by Jean Baptiste Nicaize (Necaise) who was a native of Paris, France.

Barges were built to provide better transportation for merchants to get across the Jourdan. The closest barge crossing was about 400 feet east of the present Highway 603 and named Pauline's Landing. A small school was opened at this point. As the area grew, the settlers moved inland to establish a community in 1813 and named it Kiln for the huge kiln constructed at the lumber yard. A general store, two hotels, hospital, drug store, bakery, saloon, commissary, jail house and many small businesses served the boom town. Construction of a sawmill was vital and was built in 1870 by W.W. Carre along the first logging railway. A large kiln was built serving the largest tim-

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ber industry in the south. Misfortune struck in 1912 when the mill burned. The business bankrupted and remaining interest was bought by Edward Heinz who built over 200 mill homes and employed more than 300 men. This industry lasted until 1930. Because of the depletion of lumber and the Great Depression, the economy collapsed. Mill workers left seeking work elsewhere, leaving Kiln a ghost town.

During this time the first shipyards were built; on the Jourdan River by Willie Curet and on Bayou Talla by Jeremiah Haas. Turpentine and resin were refined by J.A. McLeod at what is now the Highway 603 entrance to McLeod Park. These products were shipped by schooner to New Orleans. Today, while pulpwood is still processed in the Gulf Coast Timber Company on the Jourdan, it still remains a skeleton of the past.

Local residents, devastated by the Depression, resorted to distilling illegal whiskey, more commonly known as "White Lightning." Because of the high quality and ready availability of their whiskey, Kiln became known as the "Moonshine Capital of the World."

The notorious Al Capone purchased a fleet of boats called "Rum Runners" to transport whiskey to Chicago, Galveston and Tennessee. At designated times truckloads of whiskey traveled the road now named Kiln-Delisle, guarded by Capone's armed men. Locals tell of the collapse of the Bayou LaTerre bridge under one of Capone's

overloaded vehicles. One Jourdan River homeowner, a confederate of Capone's, would signal Capone's boats from a dormer window. One light meant clear sailing; and two meant the Revenueurs were in nearby waters.

Kiln has some of the most beautiful streams and bayous along the coastal inland, including Bayou LaTerre, Bayou Talla, Rotten Bayou and Joe-Toni Bayou, each of which feeds into the Jourdan River. Joe-Toni was once a navigable waterway and still exists, but is only 200-feet long and therefore accessible only to sports fishermen.

Of the beautiful estates on the Jourdan River, one remaining is Holly Bluff with its adjoining Darwood Gardens, a woodland of rare trees and plants. The famous Galabank was demolished when the buffer zone was established and it became a part of McLeod Park in 1976.

Holly Bluff and Darwood, on 3,600 acres, are owned by the Crump family. In earlier days there was a "Hobby House" open to visitors with a collection of *objets d'art* from around the world, such as Etruscan sculpture and pottery from the Royal Palace in Vienna.

In Darwood Gardens, the remnants of ornate wrought iron gates that once graced the entrance to Charity Hospital, New Orleans, still stand. Of greater significance to Hancock Countians is the statue of King Louis IX of France for whom Bay Saint Louis is named. Some earlier attractions were a bell tower, a large fountain with a statue of Mercury and a needle walk.

The Rev. H.A. DeMorgangies took charge of the Catholic community of Kiln and its missions in April of 1859. The Jourdan, Pearl and Wolf River areas became the "Three River Parishes." The congregation was poor and the good father traveled miles by horseback. The first church, built in 1869, was struck by lightning. A new church was built in 1886 off the Kiln-Delisle Road, named Annunciation. The church celebrated its 125th birthday in 1994.

On Jan. 31, 1887, the first post office was established on the bank of the Jourdan near the lumber yard, making it accessible to river traffic. Emile Cue was appointed postmaster. After the collapse of the lumber industry, the post office moved from that site to a small room inside Curet's Grocery on the Kiln-Delisle Road.

Blacks played a significant role in the economic development of Kiln. The races enjoyed a harmonious relationship. Church services, conducted by the Rev. J.E. Mosley were held in a building near the sawmill, and their church, which still exists today - The First Baptist Church - was built in 1897 and rebuilt in 1924. Prominent blacks made noteworthy news. Etienne W. Mason was a teacher in Hancock County who wrote a book entitled "The Progress of the Races," in which he lists 89 black captains and the vessels they mastered.

The school for black children was a one-room building which still stands on Highway 603. Miss Maude Sylvest was the school's first teacher.

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In pre-Civil War days, all teachers were paid \$1 per month per child and lived with a family in the community.

A new two story consolidated school for whites was built on Bayou Talla in 1903 for 350 students. This school was replaced by the Kiln Consolidated School formed by Nicaise, McLeod, Fenton, Silver Hill and Bayou Talla schools, at a cost of \$10,000. Today, Kiln's black and white students attend the Hancock County schools.

In the early 1960s NASA acquired property for a huge space program in Hancock County. Many families were uprooted and dispersed into the Pearlington area. The space center is surrounded by a 17-square mile "buffer zone." At present, NASA has approximately 3,531 employees.

Joan Porbes Howard, a resident of Jourdan River Shores, serves as Historian for the St. Vincent de Paul Society of Annunciation Church, Kiln. Her history of Kiln, Many faces of Change, is in the Kiln and Bay St. Louis branches of the Hancock Library System. This article consists of excerpts from that book.

(PRESIDENT from page 1) will be decided. We expect 1996 to be the most active year in our history because of our wonderful new equipment and our anticipated new room. If you would like to hold an office, please let it be known so someone can nominate you at the meeting.

Charles Gray, President



DARWOOD GARDENS GATES

HALLOWEEN IN CEDAR REST CEMETERY

The Halloween program in Cedar Rest Cemetery was a great success in spite of the rain and generally dreary day.

As usual, a great deal of the credit for planning and organizing the event goes to our own Patt Cucullu. She did an incredible job and as a result, those who attended the event enriched our building fund by more than four hundred dollars.

Thank you to the actors, the guides and to Lois Abrams, Karen Flores and the ladies from Diamondhead who staffed the Lobrano House. We have proclaimed the event to be perfect.

A special thanks to the guys of Scout troop 220 who have made the luminaries for the past three years for us. Great job always, but this year was the best!

We are frequently blessed by the generosity of our members and townfolk. We received a very nice check from Congressman and Mrs. Gene Taylor whose son Gary donated his considerable talent at the Halloween event by portraying the young

John L. Damborino. Thank you Gene, Margaret and Gary.

COMMEMORATIVE

Clayton J. Borne, Jr. of Metairie, Louisiana made a generous donation to the Society in memory of his wife, Doris M. Borne, who died recently. Mr. Borne is one of Kate Lobrano's descendants who donated her home to us in 1989. Our deepest sympathy to Mr. Borne and his family.

LOBRANO HOUSE HOURS

MON. 8 to 4 or by
TUE. 8 to 4 appointment
THU. 8 to 4

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